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The Civil Rights Act of 1964

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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the 88th Congress will not, of itself, correct these faults, but we can and must join the wisdom—the collective wisdom of this body—to the efforts of others in this Nation to face up to them for what they are—a serious erosion of the fundamental rock upon which the unity of the Nation stands.

It is bad enough to avoid decision on any majority proposal of the President. But when the whole Nation has roused itself from a hundred years of apathy and indifference and has now begun to treat this question with the deep concern which it warrants, it would be inexcusable for the Senate to shunt it aside. This body, no less than the courts and the President and the House of Representatives, is charged by the Constitution with responsibility for achieving a fundamental equity for all of the people of the United States.

I implore the Senate, therefore, when this bill is taken up, to debate it, to debate it as long as is necessary for all views to be presented and argued. But then, Mr. President, I implore the Senate to vote on it, to do whatever is necessary so that, in the end, it may be voted up or down.

There are no suave parliamentary tricks which can be used to bring us to that decisive moment. There is only such good sense as may reside in each of us and the sense of Senate responsibility with respect to the present and future needs of the Nation.

There is an ebb and flow in human affairs which at rare moments brings the complex of human events into a delicate balance. At those moments, the acts of governments may indeed influence, for better or for worse, the course of history. This is such a moment in the life of the Nation. This is that moment for the Senate.

If ever the Members of this body have needed to strive to put aside personal advantage and partisan political considerations, and to seek the national good in its noblest terms, now is that time.

I now move that the Senate proceed to the consideration of H.R. 7152, the civil rights bill.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 854, H.R. 7152, the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. HILL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, did the Senator ask for unanimous consent?

Mr. MANSFIELD. I asked for unanimous consent.

Mr. HILL. I shall have to object to that request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President—
The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, since the civil rights bill was sent over from the House, the Senate has acted on three major pieces of legislation. We voted on the tax bill conference report. We voted a bill appropriating funds for national defense. We passed badly needed agricultural legislation. Each in its own right was of immense importance to the people of the Nation.

In all frankness, I would have preferred it, had we been able to proceed directly to the consideration of civil rights legislation when the bill arrived from the House. But the responsibilities of the Senate are manifold and do not always admit of the leadership's preferences. In any event, the issue of civil rights can wait no longer in the Senate.

The courts, private groups throughout the country, the House of Representatives, and the President have faced this issue squarely and have taken a great deal of action within the limits of their capacity.

Now it is the time and turn of the Senate.

Racial inequities are among the oldest and most dangerous faults in the structure of this Nation. What we do here in